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ABSTRACT

Until recently research on women's educational and occupational aspirations has ignored the role of sex role ideology (SRI) and has concentrated primarily on college women. This study was implemented with 270 grade 12 girls, 25 percent of whom were from lower class backgrounds. Four scales of SRI were administered: femininity, power, division of labor, and women's liberation. An additional set of four scales of aspirations was also given: educational, occupational, marital aspirations, and occupational commitment. The results indicated a high correlation between educational aspiration and power and women's liberation, while marital aspirations correlated negatively with each of the four scales of the SRI. These correlations suggest that the more conviction in the equality of the sexes, the higher the educational aspirations of the girls. Agreement with the women's liberation items were the best predictors of occupational and educational aspirations, even after such important background variables as achievement and social class were controlled. The author concludes that the relationship correlations found in this study were very low, and that the results can not be generalized unless a more representative sample of subjects is used. (SE)

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EXPLAINING THE ASPIRATIONS OF WORKING CLASS GIRLS

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Studies of aspirations have until recently been concerned primarily with the male. The reasons for this are rarely spelled out, but are probably two fold. First, since a woman's status is seen to depend on her husband's achievement rather than her own (Parkin, 1972: 14-15; Parsons, 1952), it is not necessary to understand the aspirations and achievement of women in order to understand the distribution of power and privilege in our society. Secondly, it is more complicated to include women in the analysis, as the usual categories do not easily fit the girl who wants to marry and be a housewife and return to the labor market at the age of 40. The neglect of women in this literature is beginning to change, as researchers (especially women) realize that women's aspirations are interesting in themselves, that women's independent status is important, and that women's participation in the labor force is central to the way our economy works, rather than peripheral and dispensable.

Most studies of women's aspirations adopt the strategy of applying to females the models that have been developed to account for male aspirations. They find that social class background and academic achievement are the crucial variables in predicting female aspirations as they are in predicting male aspirations. The main difference is that social class background is more important for girls than it is for boys, and academic achievement is less important (Sewell, 1968; Hauser, 1971). Some studies have shown that girls from high status homes are more likely to go to college than their brothers, although overall there are fewer women in universities (Dennison, 1972). The assumption here is that those characteristics that separate low aspiring men from high aspiring men will also

separate low aspiring women from high aspiring women.

A problem that is immediately encountered in this kind of research is that sex itself makes a difference to aspirations. One can cope with this by assuming that women score lower than men on the variables that predict aspirations for men. For instance, if a positive self concept is an important predictor of aspirations, and self concepts are less positive among women than among men, one can understand why women have lower aspirations than men. This will not work for the main predictors of aspirations, as women come from homes that are equal in status to the homes men come from, and women get better academic averages, at least through high school, than men. In a study on educational aspirations and achievement, Eckland and Alexander (1974) conclude;

> It is quite clear that the educationally relevant variables examined here...do not account for the sex liability found in these data. The explanation no doubt needs extending the status attainment model to include factors typically not considered in the study of males. This might involve the addition of marriage and fertility variables, sex role specific attitudes..."

This sex liability necessitates the development of models for explaining women's aspirations that are different from the male models, and that take into account prevailing sexist beliefs.

Turner (1964) has also pointed out the necessity for developing new models for understanding females' aspirations. He notes that for men, ambition is a relatively unitary phenomenon. Material ambition necessitates educational and occupational ambition. For women, material ambitions can be realized through the husband, or through one's own achievement. This suggests that predicting women's aspirations will

require a more complicated model, one that separates status striving through a mate from status striving on one's own.

Another problem with basing female aspiration research on male models is that the measures of aspirations are restricted. Educational and occupational goals are the important variables for males. However, with females, the amount of commitment to a job, measured by the number of years a girl wants to spend doing it, is also variable, and not given as it is for (most) men. Aspirations for family are also much more salient for girls than they are for boys. To be a wife and mother may be a girl's greatest aspiration, and a study of female aspirations must include this to get an accurate picture of the hopes and plans of adolescent girls. These variables might well be included in a study of males also, although they are not.

For the preceding reasons, this study was designed to look only at females' aspirations, and to develop a model that would satisfactorily account for the development of high school girls' aspirations. The model assumes that sex role ideology is an important variable influencing girls' plans, even though it is not important for boys. At this point in time, one cannot ignore the impact of sexism on female aspirations.

A relationship between sex role ideology, career and educational planning has been found by Rossi (1965), Blumen (1970), Tangri (1969), Freedman (1967), Angrist (1970). The definitions of sex role ideology that they use vary widely and the independent influence of social class and achievement is often not controlled. More important, the research all focuses on university women with relatively high aspirations and

presumably more liberal sex role beliefs. The purpose of the research is to identify the female elite rather than to understand the planning process of most women. This study was designed to use more comprehensive measures of sex role ideology and aspirations, and to get data on working class high school girls.

Methodology and Sample

This research was carried out in a working class suburb of Boston. All the grade 12 girls in one high school were asked to fill out a questionnaire, and 270 of them (75%) did. A randomly selected twenty-five of these girls were later interviewed.

Social class was measured by combining, with weightings derived from a factor analysis, mother's education, father's education and father's occupation. Only nine percent of the students came from homes where at least one parent was university educated. Seventy-three percent of the fathers had a high school education or less. Just over 60% of the fathers had blue collar jobs. Academic ratings, in percentile form, were obtained from the school records.

Sex Role Ideologywas measured on four dimensions.

1. Femininity. Each girl was asked how important she thought it was to act "feminine." The more important she said it was, the more traditional she was considered. She had previously been asked to define femininity, and the answers consistently stressed appearance (e.g. "neat," "attractive," "fashion conscious"), passivity (e.g. "shy," "doesn't use bad language," "weak") and getting along with others (e.g. "friendly,"

"polite," "kind"). Twenty-three percent said this was very important, 45% said important, 25% said not very important, and 1% said not at all important.

2. Power. A scale measuring "male dominance ideology" was taken from Hoffman (1963). The items reflected the view that the male should make important decisions, that he was wiser and a female should follow his advice. Agreeing with the items constituted traditional ideology. Fifty percent agreed with this representative item, "some equality in a marriage is a good thing, but by and large the husband should have the final say-so in family matters."

3. Division of Labor. Hoffman's (1963) scale of "sex role ideology" was used to measure the division of labor between the sexes. These items refer exclusively to the way family tasks should be divided up. Eighty-one percent of the girls agreed on this scale that "except in special cases, the wife should do the cooking and house cleaning, and the husband should provide the family with money." The other items dealt with the father's role around the house. Agreeing with the items was used to indicate traditional sex role ideology. The responses on this scale were steered towards the "traditional" end.

4. Women's Liberation. A summary measure of sex role ideology was developed by listing a variety of demands of the women's movement. The scale was factor analyzed and items of abortion and abolishing marriage were dropped as they were unrelated to the other items. The remaining eleven items dealt with men taking over women's tasks, women moving into "male" areas, and women generally becoming more assertive

amd demanding more power. Disagreeing with these items constituted traditional sex role ideology.

The four measures of sex role ideology were correlated with each other as shown:

	Fem.	Power	DL	WL
Fem.	-	-	-	-
Power	.323	-	-	-
Dofl	.201	.386	-	-
WL	.332	.455	.455	-

All correlations are significant at less than the .001 level.

Aspirations were also measured on four dimensions.

1) Educational aspirations. The answer to the question "How far would you like to go in school?" was coded from 1 (graduate from high school only), the choice of 27% of the sample, to 5 (graduate or professional school after college graduation), the choice of nine percent of the sample.

2) Occupational aspirations. The answer to the question "What kind of job would you like to get when you finish your education?" was coded into four categories: professional, semi-professional, clerical or service, and blue collar. There were only four girls whose responses fell into the first category, and six whose reponses fell into the last category. This scale therefore showed much less variability than the other scales. and as a result the statistical analysis of it is less trustworthy. The major way that it differed from the educational scale was that the nurses fell into the high category on this scale, but into a lower category on the educational scale because many of them were not

attending university for their training.

3) Occupational commitment. The girls were asked to indicate at what periods in their lives they would like to work (before marriage, after marriage, with preschool children etc.). High job commitment meant planning on a relatively uninterrupted occupational life. Seventy-five percent of the girls wanted to work after marriage but before they had children. Four percent wanted to work with preschoolers. Thirty percent wanted to work by the time their youngest child was in high school. Almost 50% wanted to return to work after their children left home.

4) Marital aspirations. Girls were asked at what age they would like to marry, how important it was to marry, if they wanted children, and if so, how many. The answers to these questions were related to one another, and an overall index of commitment to marriage was created. Ninety-seven percent of the girls wanted to marry, and 64% said this was extremely or very important. The preferred marriage ages were 20-23, and two thirds wanted more than two children (80% would be extremely or very disappointed if they could have no children). It is interesting that children appear more attractive than husbands.

The first three measures of educational and occupational aspirations were highly correlated with another, and marital aspirations were negatively correlated with the others.

The girls were also asked what level of education and occupation they would like their husband to have, and whether they would be disappointed if he had a given level of education or occupation. Fourteen

percent would not answer the open-ended question on education, and 28% did not answer on occupation. Many of them wrote in such phrases as "whatever he wants," "I wouldn't say." Only four girls refused to answer the more specific questions, but I assume that those girls with a strong romantic bent who refused to answer the open-ended question, would go through all the categories and say they would not be disappointed. As a result there is some confusion as to what "not disappointed" means. To one group of girls it means, "don't be so sordid. I won't marry a man for anything but love." To another group, it means, "I really do not care about and/or expect a well-educated husband."

These girls have much higher aspirations for their husbands than they have for themselves. Sixty-four percent of those responding wanted a husband with a professional job and 61% would be "disappointed" if their husbands were factory workers. Only 15% would be "disappointed" if their husband did not have a college degree. Thus there is a fair amount of leeway between desires and what would be acceptable.

Overall then, this was a predominantly working class sample with fairly traditional sex role beliefs and fairly low aspirations. This study attempts to analyze what differentiates the relatively career oriented, "higher" aspirer from her lower aspiring friend. It does not, however, attempt to understand who will become the female elite, since probably none of this elite is represented in the sample. When a "high" aspirer is mentioned in this study, the actual level of the aspirations should be kept in mind. The variables that differentiate high aspirers

in this study may not be the same variables that differentiate high aspirers in a higher achieving sample.

Analysis of the Findings

Table 1 shows that there is a relationship between traditional sex role beliefs and low aspirations. The relationship was discussed in the interviews and the following quotations are representative of the issues raised.

1. "Men have a career. Women just get married."
2. (The advantages of being a girl?) "You don't have to go out and get an education."
3. "Men have to support a family, but for women it doesn't really matter what kind of job you get. It's really not that important."
4. "Career? I never want to make a career...I want to get married and have kids. If you get all involved in a career, I think something happens to the kids. They need their mother, not their father. Women just work on weekends. With their husband around, they can go out and waitress and get the extra money they need."
5. (Parents treat your brothers differently?) "It's really important for them to go to college. If they could manage, they'd also put me through, but it's 3 or 4 thousand dollars."
6. "A woman's job is in the home."
7. "(Why go to college?) A guy has to go to college to get a good job and support a family. To find out about life. A girl has to have something in common with a guy to talk to him."
8. (Why go to college?) "You never can tell if you'll have to support a family, if your husband gets sick."
9. "You're limited being a woman, You're not even aware of the things you could do...If I was a boy I'd be more ambitious about being an artist. I wouldn't go to college, I'd travel around the country and be more free, more able to do what I wanted."

The quotations indicate the complexity of the relationship between sex role beliefs and achievement patterns, as well as showing that generally,

TABLE 1

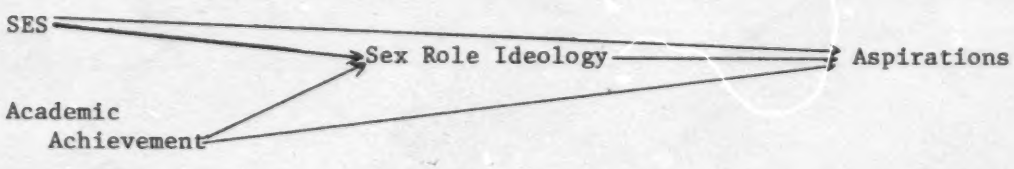
Zero Order Correlations of Sex Role Ideology Scales with Aspirations.

	Educational Aspirations	Occupational Aspirations	Occupational Commitment	Marital Aspirations
Femininity	.150*	.143*	.027	-.125
Power	.301***	.138*	.197**	-.203**
Division of Labor	.195***	.109	.139	-.194**
Women's Liberation	.297***	.221	.195	-.176*

accepting traditional beliefs about "women's place" will depress aspirations. However, the last quotation shows that being female may in some groups increase educational attainment levels, when college is the expected, conservative alternative. The other comments stress that achievement outside the home is not as important for a girl, although there may be good "feminine" reasons to go to college (#7.8) even if one is not career oriented.

The correlations show that some aspects of sex role ideology are more importantly related to aspirations that others. The overall measure of agreement with women's liberation ideas is most highly correlated with aspirations, especially educational aspirations. The least correlated is the measure of "femininity," which refers mainly to the way girls feel they must act (and they often see it as acting, rather than expressing their true personality) to be attractive to males, and the division of labor, which is seen as trivial by many. Educational aspirations are more highly correlated with sex role ideology than other aspirations.

The relationship between sex role ideology and aspirations could be accounted for by their common relationship to background variables, especially social class and academic achievement. To check this hypothesis, a path analysis model was tested in which SES and achievement were entered into the equation first, and sex role ideology was entered as an intervening variable. The model is shown below:



The assumption here is that certain background factors will predispose a girl to value achievement and success, but that this predisposition will affect her aspirations for herself more strongly if she holds a modern sex role ideology that sees independent achievement as appropriate for females. There will be some direct effect of background factors on aspirations because of the variety of motivations for education and a high status job, some of which are quite congruent with traditional femininity. For instance, a girl may desire a university education because she enjoys learning, she thinks she will meet a husband at university or because she sees that her first preference for a traditional life style might not be attainable. The four different measures of sex role ideology and aspirations were entered into the path analysis model.

1) Educational Aspirations

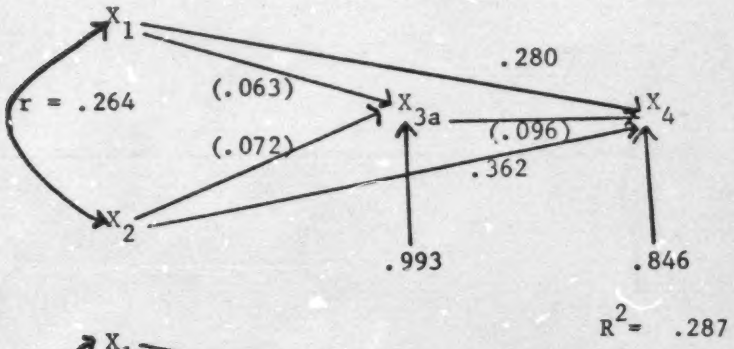
Figure 1 shows the results obtained when the model was tested using educational aspirations as the dependent variable. It indicates that the Power and Women's Liberation scales are important in understanding educational aspirations of girls even after background variables are controlled. This is not true for the other two scales of sex role ideology, however. If the women's liberation scale is considered a measure of general commitment to liberation from traditional sex roles, the general hypothesis of this study is confirmed.

It is also interesting to look at which of the three more narrowly defined aspects of sex role ideology is most important in predicting

Figure 1

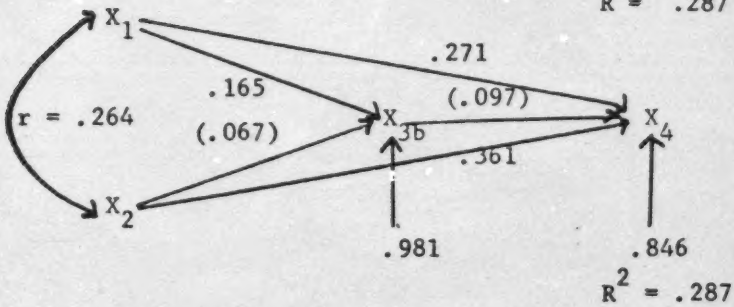
Path Analysis of Educational Aspirations from Academic Achievement, Social Class and Sex Role Ideology.

A.



$R^2 = .287$

B.



$R^2 = .287$

X_1 = SES

X_2 = Academic Achievement

X_{3a} = Femininity

X_{3b} = Division of Labor

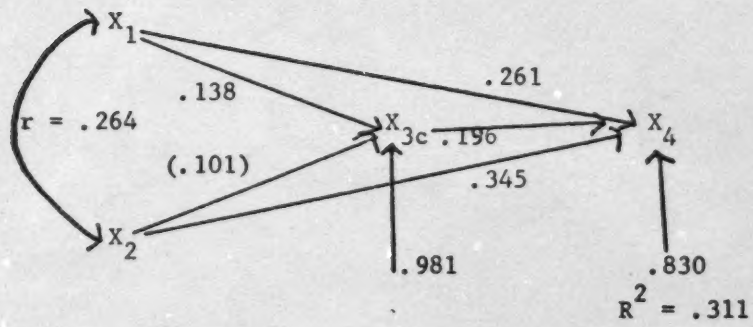
X_{3c} = Women's Liberation

X_{3d} = Power

X_4 = Educational Aspirations

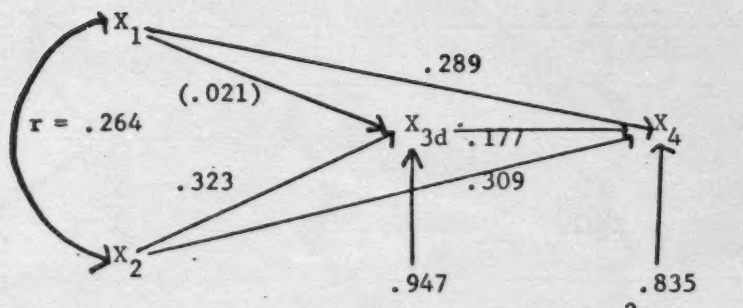
Figures in parenthesis are not significant.

C.



$R^2 = .311$

D.



$R^2 = .302$

aspirations at the end of high school, when some critical plans and decisions about the future must be made. It appears that a sense of equality with males is most likely to raise aspirations. A modern score on this power scale is predicted by academic achievement and popularity in the high school. This suggests that succeeding. and presumably therefore having power in the school setting, raises one's expectations about having power later on. If a girl can be a leader in school, academically or socially or in both areas, she does not feel as inclined to defer to males later on either.

Most girls agreed that "femininity" was important, and they also felt that it was a bit of an act that you had to put on for males ("you can't be feminine all the time. Maybe when you go on a date.") and that it was merely a convenient mask for your real personality. Perhaps because it was so often seen as "play acting" it did not have an effect on real plans at this stage. One wonders how long this double personality can be maintained, however, and what effects it will ultimately have.

The division of labor in the home was perceived by most girls as a rather distant and trivial problem and there was much agreement on the traditional roles. The girls tended to use their parents as models on the questions that were asked, and could not see why "who does the dishes?" was an important concern. They would not "hassle about trivia", but would gladly look after the home of the man they loved. At this stage of life, looking after the house was not frequently seen as an obstacle to one's own achievement. Although children were, as some of the previous quotations indicate, this did not show up strongly as the

scale included more items about housework, and the item that did have to do with the woman's primary responsibility to children was so widely agreed on that it was not very good at discriminating among groups.

2) Occupational Aspirations

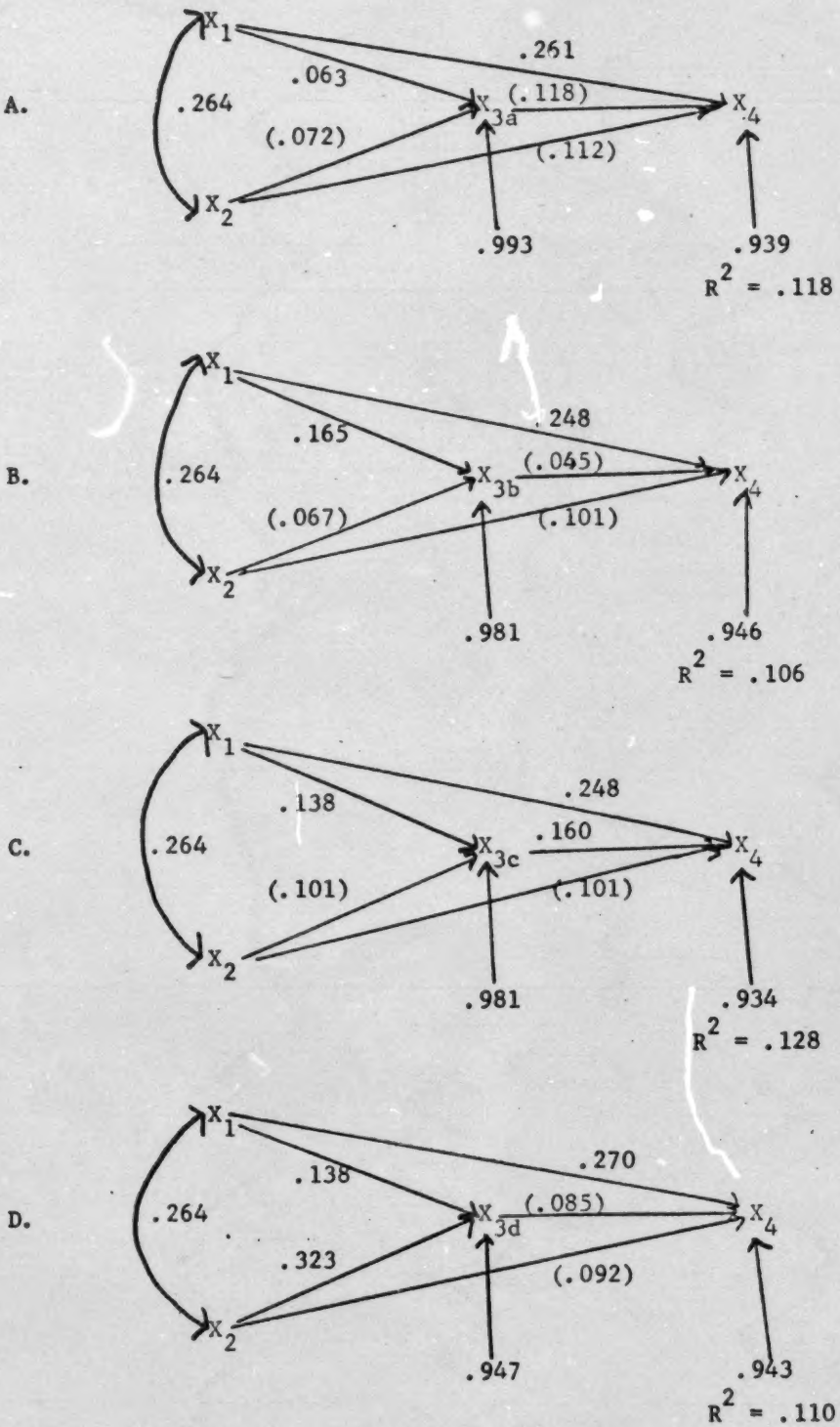
It should be kept in mind that 95% of the respondents fell into two categories on this item. The path analysis (figure 2) reveals that the only sex role ideology scale that significantly predicts occupational aspirations is the women's liberation scale. Social class background is by far the most important predictor overall, but the R^2 is quite low for all the models. The R^2 is lowered necessarily but the lack of variability in the dependent variable. The girls aspiring to be nurses are here included in the "high aspiration" category, and these girls are predominantly from relatively high social class backgrounds with lowish academic averages. It is interesting that even in this case, sex role ideology is relatively important: more important than academic achievements.

3) Occupational Commitment

The Power and Women's Liberation scales are significant predictors of the amount of time a girl wants to spend working outside the home, even after background variables have been entered into the model. In this case, sex role ideology is more important than either academic achievement or social class. The R^2's here are barely significant, which suggests either that girls are unsure in answering this question

Figure 2

Path Analysis of Occupational Aspirations from Academic Achievement, Social Class and Sex Role Ideology.



X_1 = SES

X_2 = Academic Achievement

X_{3a} = Femininity

X_{3b} = Division of Labor

X_{3c} = Women's Liberation

X_{3d} = Power

X_4 = Occupational Aspirations

Figures in parenthesis are not significant.

and their responses are fairly random, and/or that the usual background variables are not as relevant to predicting commitment to an occupation as they are in predicting level of education and occupation desired.

It is worth noting that sex role ideology is the most significant predictor here where individual achievement is least confounded with status striving. It is in understanding the priority a girl gives to her achievement goals that sex role ideology is particularly important. It still appears to be an overall Women's Liberation commitment, and a belief in equal power that are the most important parts of sex role ideology.

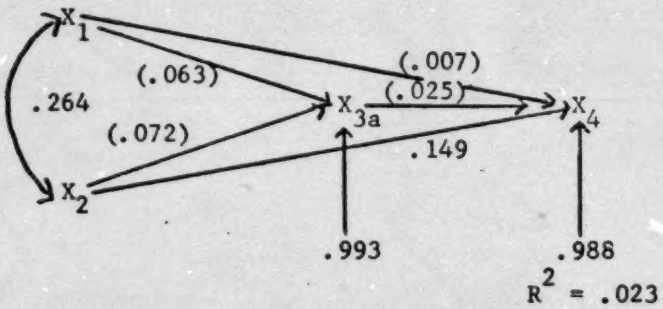
Marital Aspirations

Marital aspirations are also very poorly predicted by the present set of models. Sex role ideology on the Women's Liberation, Power and Femininity scales are the best predictors used. The present organization of our society defines occupational commitment as the opposite of marital commitment for the woman, and this data does show that the girls who are committed to one are less committed to the other. The division of labor scale is not very predictive even of marital aspirations, surprisingly. The fact that as indicated earlier, three of the five items dealt specifically with the woman's responsibility for housecleaning and cooking, trivial but grownup and therefore status giving activities to many girls may be one reason. The lack of difference of opinion on this scale may be another.

Figure 3

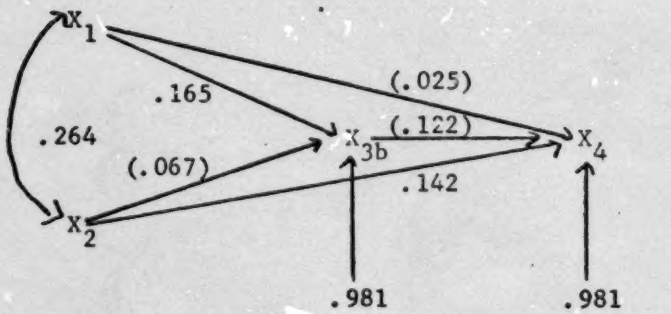
Path Analysis of Occupational Commitment from Academic Achievement, Social Class and Sex Role Ideology.

A.



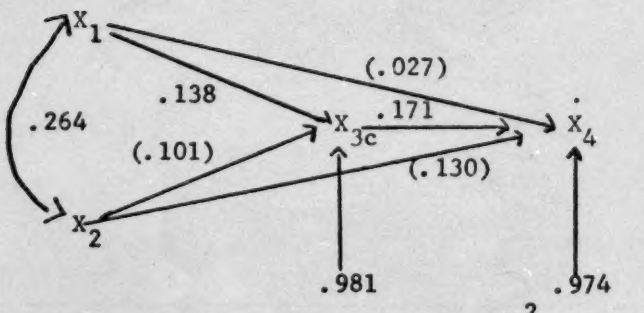
$R^2 = .023$

B.



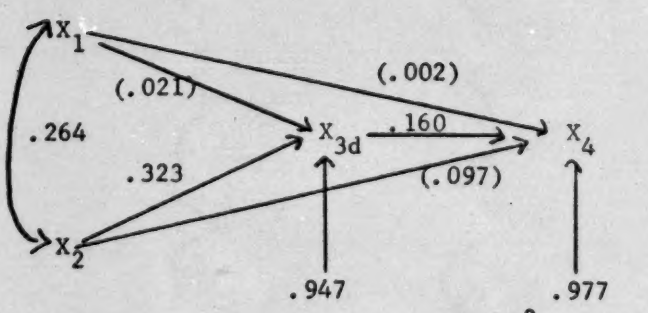
$R^2 = .037$

C.



$R^2 = .051$

D.



$R^2 = .045$

X_1 = SES

X_2 = Academic Achievement

X_{3a} = Femininity

X_{3b} = Division of Labor

X_{3c} = Women's Liberation

X_{3d} = Power

X_4 = Occupational Commitment

Figures in parenthesis are not significant.

Other Models

The above model incorporates only the bare bones of a model for understanding women's aspirations. It includes, however, the most powerful variables. A variety of other models were also tested and will be discussed briefly here.

More social psychological variables were used in a model that included parents' sex role ideology, self concept on a "domestic" versus tomboy dimension, popularity, boyfriend's sex role ideology and the variables incorporated in the previous model. The amount of variance explained did not increase significantly except on the occupational commitment and marital aspiration models. Adding self concept on the "independence" dimension increased the predictability of occupational commitment significantly. A domestic self concept was particularly important for the girls who were committed to marrying young. However, none of these other variables are as important as sex role ideology, and none diminish the power of sex role ideology to predict aspirations. The conclusion drawn from these more complex models was that one can profitably include self concept measures on a femininity dimension in explaining occupational versus marital commitment for high school girls, although they are not usually incorporated into sociologists' work. These variables are not independently as important for predicting educational and occupational aspirations.

In an attempt to test Turner's idea that status aspirations may be conceived of as separate from achievement aspirations in women, the oringinal model, with SES, academic achievement and sex role ideology,

was tested using husbands status as the dependent variable. The problems with interpreting lack of high aspirations for a husband have been discussed. When the analysis was done, it was found that high SES and high academic achievement were significantly related to desired husband's status, but that sex role ideology was not. This finding indicates that, as predicted, desire for status as indicated by husbnad's education and job is not affected by sex role ideology, although desire for individual achievement is. Both kinds of aspirations are related to background status variables.

Conclusions

This study confirms the hypothesis that one should include measures of sex role ideology when trying to predict the aspirations of high school girls. Until we get rid of sexist myths, they will have an important influence on how girls plan their lives. This may seem like an unexciting conclusion, but very little research has heeded it.

This study is not large enough or representative enough of any one group to make very firm statements about the magnitutde of the relationships studied. The R^2's are quite low, especially on some of the path models, but then this is true of much social science research. The measure of occupational aspriations is not entirely satisfactory, and the distribution of responses to some of the sex role measures is quite skewed. The sample of girls is quite representative of one working class high school, but it is not clear what the high school itself is representative of, and thus how far the results can be generalized.

Despite these problems, which in the main will lead to an underestimation of the effect of sex role ideology, it does clearly emerge that sex role ideology, is an important variable in this sort of equation, even among girls with relatively conservative views, and relatively low aspirations.

The data suggest that an overall acceptance of sex role changes and of equal power relationships between the sexes are the most important aspects of sex role ideology in terms of their implications for future plans. Both are related to achievement in high school. It seems that generally the experiences of success and thus equality (or superiority) in high school can develop a girl's confidence and her expectation of continuing equal status with men. Thus, more opportunity for equal status contact and female success should be provided in the high school, so that girls begin to make choices as human beings, unencumbered by sex role myths. Until this occurs, the acceptance of these myths will be an important determinant of future planning and should not be ignored in our psychological or social models.

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